

Outdoor Water Use in the United States

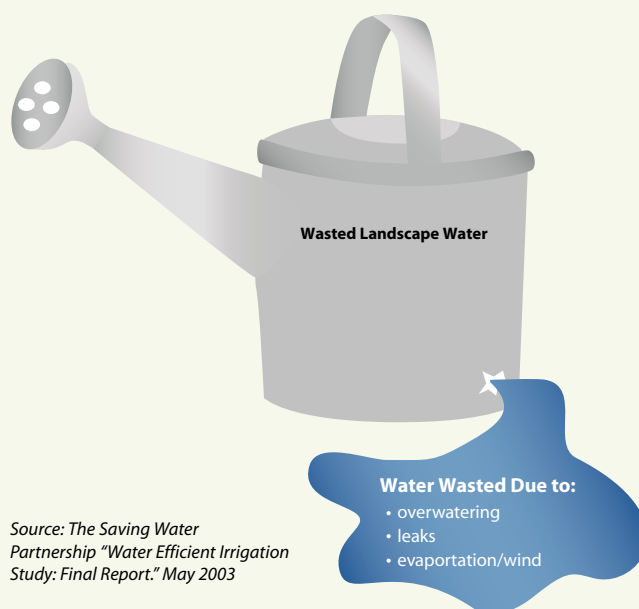
The average American family of four uses 400 gallons of water per day, and about 30 percent of that is devoted to outdoor uses. More than half of that outdoor water is used for watering lawns and gardens. Nationwide, landscape irrigation is estimated to account for almost one-third of all residential water use, totaling more than 7 billion gallons per day. Other residential outdoor uses include washing automobiles, maintaining swimming pools, and cleaning sidewalks and driveways.

Water use varies greatly depending on geographic location and season, largely as a result of differences in climate. Water withdrawals for irrigation and landscaping are highest in the drier regions of the West and Southwest, where population growth is often greatest.

Some experts estimate that more than 50 percent of commercial and residential irrigation water use goes to waste due to evaporation, runoff, or overwatering. Following are some common outdoor water inefficiencies, but there are simple solutions to reduce water waste and produce great results:

- Many people water their lawns too often and for too long, over-saturating plants. It's usually not necessary to water grass every day. Instead, test your lawn by stepping on a patch of grass; if it springs back, it doesn't need water.
- Regular maintenance of an irrigation system can help ensure that water is distributed evenly on the lawn and does not overspray onto paved areas. Look for an irrigation contractor certified in system maintenance and auditing to keep your system working efficiently.
- An inefficient irrigation system can waste water and money each month, but using weather-based irrigation scheduling on a moderate sized yard, for example, can reduce a household's out-

Outdoor Water Use: Landscaping



Source: The Saving Water Partnership "Water Efficient Irrigation Study: Final Report." May 2003

door water use by about 15 percent, saving up to 37 gallons of water every day. Alternatively, a weather-based irrigation controller can do the scheduling for you, providing the right amount of water to your plants automatically, if adjusted properly.

- Landscaping with plants that are not adaptive to your climate increases water use and costs. Instead, use native plants, or species adapted to the local climate, which reduce outdoor water use by 20 to 50 percent.

WaterSense, a voluntary public-private partnership program sponsored by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, seeks to help homeowners and businesses improve water efficiency and reduce their costs by promoting efficient irrigation technologies such as weather-based irrigation controllers and certification programs for irrigation contractors. For more information, visit www.epa.gov/watersense.